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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT FORMATION UPDATE: ALLAWI SAYS SCIRI
FEARS FADHILA/SADRIST FLIGHT

REF: BAGHDAD 0195

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ZALMAY KHALILZAD FOR REASON 1.4 (b).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Allawi told the Ambassador on February 1 that the Shia Coalition is confused, with SCIRI fearing a Sadrism and Fadhila pullout. Allawi claimed that Mohammed Ridha Sistani is exerting efforts to hold the coalition together, but has limited influence over the Fadhila Party. Referring to sharp public criticism Tariq al-Hashimi (IIP) had directed at the MOI February 1, Allawi said that he would try to restrain Tawafuq's leadership from making inflammatory comments. He also claimed that Talabani is under growing pressure from Tehran to support SCIRI's Adil Abd' al-Mahdi for the premiership. Allawi and Barzani both said that a government led by al-Mahdi would tilt too far toward Iran. In a separate conversation, Fadhila party insider al-Shamiri told PolCouns that he doubted Fadhila could risk pulling out of the Shia Coalition in the end, although it could threaten to do so. Ultimately, Fadhila could not risk the wrath of the Najaf clerical establishment which probably would work to hold the Shia Coalition together. Al-Shamiri predicted that if the Shia Alliance could not reach a compromise on PM selection, the matter would be brought to a membership vote. END SUMMARY.

ALLAWI'S READ: SHIA COALITION WOBBLY

12. (C) At a February 1 lunch with the Ambassador, Dr. Ayad Allawi described the situation within the Shia Coalition as "very confused." He said Coalition members are still fighting and are scared about what the Fadhila Party might do. He claimed that SCIRI is afraid that the Coalition might fall apart, with the Sadrists ready to leave the Coalition if Fadhila departs first. He added that SCIRI is sending him messages to support Adil Abd' al-Mahdi for PM because, if Fadhila left, Abd' al-Mahdi's candidacy would be doomed. Dr. Allawi also told the Ambassador that Ayatollah Sistani's son (Muhammad Rida) is exerting efforts to hold the Coalition together and that Sistani is aware of the nature of these discussions. However, Dr. Allawi said Sistani has limited influence on Fadhila because Ayatollah Yaqubi (whom Fadhila looks upon as its spiritual leader) is continuing to support party chief Nadeem al-Jabiri. The Ambassador stressed the importance of getting a clear understanding from al-Jabiri; Dr. Allawi said al-Jabiri will consult with them when he returns to Iraq.

ALLAWI CAUTIONS ON TALABANI

13. (C) Dr. Allawi agreed with the assessment that Tariq al-Hashimi's February 1 public statement criticizing MOI was too powerful and not helpful to the formation of a national unity government. Dr. Allawi said he will try to restrain

Tawafuq. Dr. Allawi stated that President Talabani is trying to please both the United States and Iran, and agreed that Talabani has made too many commitments. He added that Talabani is under growing pressure from Iran (NOTE: to support Adil Abd al-Mahdi for PM. END NOTE.) Dr. Allawi said neighboring Arab countries have bought into the Erbil Agreement and are willing to help with its implementation. Dr. Allawi said they could help pressure President Talabani to distance himself from Iran.

BARZANI: KURDS INSIST ON ALLAWI BEING IN

14. (C) At a February 1 dinner with the Ambassador, Dr. Ayad Allawi and KRG President Massoud Barzani said that Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim hosted a lunch February 1 with all of the major political parties. Barzani stated that no agreement has been reached within the Shia Coalition on a Prime Minister candidate. He added that he told the Shia Coalition that the Kurdish Alliance will not participate in a new government without the Iraqi National List. Dr. Allawi confirmed a written agreement between Tawaffuq, the Iraqi National List, and the National Dialogue Front to form one bloc. He denied statements from Jalal Talabani to Barzani that Tawaffuq had withdrawn from this bloc.

ALLAWI, BARZANI CAUTION ON IRAN ANGLE

15. (C) Both confirmed their preference for Nadeem al-Jabiri as Prime Minister. Both said they would prefer Jafari if a choice had to be made between Jafari and 'Abd al-Mahdi. 'Abd al-Mahdi is personally a better choice, but it would be a

strategic mistake for Iraq because the new government would be too close to Iran. Dr. Allawi specifically cited 'Abd al-Mahdi's lack of an Islamist constituency and his subsequent dependence on Abdul Aziz al-Hakim for direction and guidance. He also pointed to 'Abd al-Mahdi's strong personal relationship with Jalal Talabani, who is also close to Iran. Barzani said SCIRI, Jalal Talabani, and Iran have had a long-time close relationship. Barzani declined to speculate on what he would do if 'Abd al-Mahdi became the PM candidate and Fadhila did not leave the Shia Coalition. He stated that "in all circumstances," the government program must be clear, although he added that such a situation could split the Kurdish Alliance. Dr. Allawi and KRG President Barzani agreed to meet separately with Nadeem al-Jabiri within the next two days.

MORE CAUTIOUS READ FROM FADHILA INSIDER

16. (C) Fadhila Party Political Bureau Chief and Jabiri confidante Shaikh Hassan al-Shamiri told PolOffs that that the Shia Islamist Coalition is edging closer to deciding to decide about the premiership. Ideally, he said, the Coalition would make its decision on the basis of consensus. Shamiri asserted that Jafari and Abd al-Mahdi would cancel each other out, leaving Jabiri as the compromise choice. (He stated that, on the basis of his meeting January 31 evening with Sadrists, Jafari's support among Sadrists appears still strong.) If no consensus within the Coalition is possible, ultimately the prime minister decision will come to a vote among the Coalition parliamentarians. He opined that the vote would take place initially with all four candidates in play; the lowest vote-getter would be eliminated in the first round. Voting rounds would continue until one candidate remained with a majority. He thought such a vote would occur by the middle of next week.

17. (C) Al-Shamiri told PolCouns that the Fadhila Party is unlikely to quit the Shia Islamist Coalition if Jabiri is not chosen as the Coalition's prime minister candidate. He noted that quitting the Coalition carried big risks, especially

from Najaf. Recalling that the Najaf clerical establishment had strongly backed unity of Shia Islamist Coalition in the transition government, Shamiri anticipated that Najaf could launch a withering verbal blast at Fadhila that would be very harmful to the party. Shia voters, he commented, are "simple" and do not understand politics. They only understand what the Najaf establishment tells them. Risking Najaf's wrath, he concluded, would be an "adventure" that Fadhila could not risk. Shamiri then added that Jabiri could, of course, threaten to leave the Coalition without actually doing so.

18. (C) Shamiri was upbeat about Jabiri's chances inside the Coalition on the basis of the broader support it could claim outside the Coalition. He stated that Jabiri would work to reunite all Iraqis and therefore has support from the Sunni Arab Tawafuq Front. Later, however, Shamiri brushed aside reports of Tawaffuq complaints about excesses committed by the Interior Ministry as mere political gamesmanship. (Shamiri later displayed a similar lack of acuity when discussing fuel price reforms. He rejected market reforms in general because, he claimed, Iraqis cannot absorb more price shocks. Instead, the government should promote industrialization to create jobs.)

NEXT STEPS

19. (C) Ambassador will join the lunch hosted by President Talabani for Iraqi political leaders. Around February 3 the Ambassador will meet with Dr. Allawi and Barzani to assess issues in light of the political party meetings scheduled in the next few days. The goal is to reach agreement in the next 2-3 days on the inclusion of the four groups and the formation of working groups to discuss the specifics of the government program.
KHALILZAD